

Dear Members of the Education Committee,

I have been teaching science and math for 25 years and I have two beautiful children. I keep wondering why parents, children and educators are being forced to suffer through this “education reform”. We didn’t vote for this. We have some of the best schools in the country, if not the world. As a parent, I know my children’s teachers work hard and that my children are learning. So, how did we get here? Did the general public want this? Apparently, we are experiencing this insanity due to the promise of Race To The Top funds; and yet, we still haven’t received a penny. So why are we doing this?

There are so many aspects of this new system that are wrong for children and I have difficulty deciding where to begin.

The implementation of the new evaluation plan is a fiasco. I started this school year looking at data. I spent about two months collecting and analyzing CMT data so I could write appropriate goals that would measure student growth. This was hard to do since my students in algebra are advanced. They are at the top and it was discomfoting to know that their scores had nowhere to go but down. I did settle on my goal and began teaching the children. Then Stephan Pryor pushed districts to embrace Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium test instead of the CMT. When my district chose to pilot SBAC, this meant that I had no method to measure my students’ success; I had to start over. I cannot imagine how much collective time, energy and money in Connecticut has been wasted due to this poor planning.

Starting next week, our school will spend 8 weeks administering the SBAC practice test. This means that our computer labs (which we normally use to teach) will be unavailable for 8 weeks plus additional weeks for make-up testing. In contrast, the CMT was administered in 2 weeks. It is absolutely outrageous that our students are being used by SBAC to test the test. The results will not inform instruction. The results will be used to improve the corporate metric. It is sickening.

The SBAC questions are so vague and odd, that teachers have been compelled to teach students how to deal with the SBAC questions. I’m not confident that the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium questions are valid. The questions are unnecessarily complex. If a question were answered incorrectly, I don’t think it would be possible to discern the reason. Perhaps the child didn’t

read carefully? Perhaps s/he didn't understand how to drag shapes around the screen? Perhaps the child didn't understand the math? A math question should be written to determine if a child understands a mathematical concept; it shouldn't include extraneous information that interferes with the analysis of a student's performance.

The CMT, in contrast, gives educators solid data that is used to inform our teaching.

As a parent, I have opted my children out of the SBAC field test. The over-emphasis on testing doesn't serve children. Art, music, physical education and social studies are being over-looked as districts focus on reading and math.

The Governor seems to believe that the only key to education is good teaching; granted, it is essential – but so is parent involvement and student effort. We also need to remember that student scores are correlated with social economic status. If we focus on fixing the inequality, then scores will improve. I don't think that making the tests harder or longer will help students succeed more. We need to understand that children are more than a test score. We need to remember that the purpose of education is to make good citizens.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Jon Hand